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becoming undone

DARWINIAN REFLECTIONS ON LIFE,
POLITICS, AND ART

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tible beauty and charm, resides in this incalculable force of sexual appeal that was ignored by virtually all other theorists of evolution. In developing his understanding of the entwined relations between sexual and natural selection, he made it clear that as the engine for the biological creation of variation or difference, sexual difference, the irreducible existence of at least two types of sexual morphology, is central to explaining life on earth. This makes him, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, the first feminist of difference.

I CONTINUE TO EXPLORE Darwin's relevance to contemporary feminist thought in the next chapter by examining the relation between his concepts and those elaborated by Irigaray.

NONE

Sexual Difference as Sexual Selection

IRIGARAYAN REFLECTIONS ON DARWIN

I have suggested throughout this text, without adequately exploring the idea, that perhaps the works of Luce Irigaray on the question of sexual difference—the most central concept defining her position—could find strange and unexpected support from the work of Darwin. Irigaray's concept is, perhaps, just what Darwin elaborated in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. It may be, ironically, in view of the feminist resistance to biological frameworks and modes of explanation, that Irigaray finds the greatest philosophical confirmation of her claims regarding sexual difference in Darwin's understanding of the power and force of sexual selection. Darwin's work, with equal irony, in view of the belief of evolutionary biologists, psychologists, and others that they are the true heirs of his insights into the origins and evolution of life, may be best interpreted not only as a wide-ranging and systematic account of the forces that compose and transform natural existence but also as the first theoretical framework that makes the amorphous forces of sexual attraction and sexual differentiation productive of all of the richness and complexity of life.

If Irigaray sees sexual difference as the engine of cultural life, Darwin sees it as the motor of natural existence. Can Irigaray's concept, which she clearly wrote with women's social, cultural, and conceptual subordination in mind, find resonance in biological theory? Can biology, through the transformation wrought by Darwin's revolution, provide feminist thought with resources by which to understand sexual difference? Is sexual differ-

ence not only one of the regulating questions of social and cultural life but one of the questions that biology itself must address, one of the natural provocations for complexifying and proliferating life itself? Is sexual difference the universal question that life, in all its various human and nonhuman forms, attempts to address? Or is sexual difference one among many cultural differences, like race, class, ethnicity, or religion, that constitute the richness and conflict that characterizes only human social and cultural life? What is the ontological status of sexual difference—a concept that many feminists have affirmed as fundamentally cultural and variable, rather than essential—if it is rooted in and elaborated through biology? Can Irigaray and Darwin be used to illuminate the most radical insights of each other?

Irigaray and the Concept of Sexual Difference

Irigaray's understanding of the concept of sexual difference is by now quite well known, even if, nearly forty years or more after its elaboration in her earlier works, it is still not very well understood. This concept is the most central concept of contemporary feminist theory, the concept that elaborates both an entire research paradigm that can affect all forms of knowledge, and a politico-ethical project that involves major transformations in social, cultural, and interpersonal life. It is a concept that has the potential to change how life is understood and lived, a concept that can affect how we understand both nature and culture, both ourselves and the world.

Irigaray has argued that sexual difference is the threshold concept of our age, the singular philosophical issue that defines the present. It is not only the concept of most interest to women as a category, or to feminists involved in women's struggles. Rather, her claim is stronger—that sexual difference is the most significant *philosophical* concept, the most significant thought, issue, idea, of our age, the concept that defines the social, political, and intellectual preoccupations of our era. By its careful articulation, through its entwinement with all the other concepts it is bound up with and affects—all those concepts related to every category or type of lived difference, among them, differences in sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, religion, economic status, geography, and politics, that is, differences generally inassimilable within the forms of democracy that we currently recognize—sexual difference marks the threshold of a new way of understanding ourselves, the world, and conceptuality itself.

It is the pivotal concept for understanding the entwinement of all other

social, political, and individual differences and the bonds that may serve to unite subjects across and in recognition of these differences. This is why it is not just one concept among many others, but a defining concept, a concept that opens up conceptuality itself, a *philosophical* concept par excellence, which makes it also a concept that affects life, that affects the social and all its products, that affects also what is larger than life, a collective order as well as the natural and the divine. For Irigaray, sexual difference, as that which has been repressed or unacknowledged by patriarchal cultures, is the concept whose elaboration has the potential to transform our relations to ourselves, to our world, and to our future. Along with the concept of difference itself, sexual difference is the engine of virtually all living difference, the concept whose elaboration has helped to specify the research paradigms and forms of conceptuality that mark the present. Whether sexual difference is an elaboration and specification of pure difference (following the contrary works of Saussure, Derrida, or Deleuze), or whether pure difference is itself the consequence of sexual difference, as Irigaray implies, is a question that I cannot directly address here, but one that has marked the sometimes terse relations between Irigaray's work and that of contemporary (male) philosophy.¹

I will develop Irigaray's account of sexual difference only in outline form, recapitulating many of her central claims regarding the concept, claims that have been elaborated in considerable detail in the primary texts of Irigaray, through her most astute readers (Margaret Whitford, Karen Burke, Ellen Mortensen, and Naomi Schor); and in preceding chapters of this book. Her central claims regarding sexual difference are as follows:

1. Sexual difference is the most basic, irreducible, nonreciprocal difference between the sexes; it is the incapacity of one sex to step into the body, role, and position of the other sex.²
2. Sexual difference is morphological difference, the difference in the significance and meaning of the body, and in the perceptual and qualitative immersion in the world that is developed through the body. Where many feminists have interpreted this bodily difference as anatomical and thus as given, Irigaray insists that bodily difference is lived, is never a raw nature but always mediated by cultural and psychical significance. The bodies of men and women are not lived merely anatomically, but are constructed through the constitution of their organs as functional only through various forms of attaining psycho-social value and meaning. Sexual difference is the

concept that differentiates bodies, not in terms of their nature but in terms of their value and use.³

3. Sexual difference is not only irreducible, it is also immeasurable, incalculable, a relation between terms that have no outside measure, no third term, no object to provide a metric by which to judge this relation or its constituents.⁴
4. Sexual difference is not a comparative relation between two entities, two sexes, that are independently given. It is not a comparison or contrast of two autonomous entities but is constitutive of the two sexes, which do not preexist their differentiation.
5. Sexual difference does not exist in its own terms, or in terms adequate to its conceptual and political expression. Given that recorded history is the history of various types of patriarchy, sexual difference has been reduced to forms of opposition, in which man and his associated masculinized qualities are regarded as positive and woman and her associated feminized qualities are regarded as the negation of those positive terms. Alternatively, woman is reduced to a position of sexual complementarity, in which the feminine is only ever regarded as that which complements the masculine rather than that which itself requires complementing; or to a position of sexual equality, in which women and the feminine are regarded as versions of, or formally the same as, men and masculinity.
6. Sexual difference is not based on existing characteristics of the two sexes, which at best reflect the social constraints patriarchy has imposed on one sex for the interests of the other, but is indeterminable, does not yet exist, though it nevertheless has the right to exist and elaborate itself. Sexual difference is indeterminable difference, the difference between two beings who do not yet exist, who are in the process of becoming. It is a difference that is always in the process of differentiating itself.
7. Sexual difference is both a mode of differentiation of that which must differentiate itself and also a form of sexuality, a mode of erotic encounter that links different bodies in specific if open-ended modes of intensity that may result in reproduction but are not directed to it. Sexual difference, as bodily difference, is not reducible to genital differences but does include such differences and the practices they enable.⁵
8. Sexual difference is a universal. It is that which marks all of natural

as well as cultural life; moreover, it marks two modes of transition in the movement from nature to culture. It is a lived universal that is the condition for the emergence of other natural and cultural differences.⁶

9. While sexual difference characterizes the potential as well as the actual relations between the two sexes, it cannot be reduced to reproduction, which is its indirect product but never its *telos*. Sexual difference enables the existence of two radically different beings to create a third being, irreducible to either but the product of both. This third cannot be identified with the child, who is one of these two. This third is the creation of something new in the relation between the two, an object, quality, or relation that can mediate between the two, can confirm the relation between the two.⁷
10. Sexual difference is not only contained within the sexual identities of male and female; its implications are far ranging and touch on the real itself. Sexual difference is not simply the existence of two different types of subject, but includes at least two different perspectives, frameworks, experiences, modes of conceptualization, forms of knowledge, and techniques of existence, or at least two ways of undertaking *any* activity. The ontology of sexual difference entails sexually different epistemologies and forms of pragmatics — that is, different relations to subjects, objects, and the world itself.
11. Sexual difference is the condition for the existence of multiple worlds, not just a single shared world. Sexual difference entails not only that each subject occupies its own morphological, perceptual, and associative relation to the world but that it can indirectly access other morphological, perceptual, and associative relations through its capacity to engage with and co-occupy a shared world, a world other than the one immediately available to the subject, through its relation to the other. The one who is sexually other than me is the one who offers me a world other than the one I occupy, who opens up new worlds to me.⁸
12. Sexual difference is the force involved in the production of all other differences, and thus has an ontological status that is radically different from that of racial, ethnic, religious, class, and other differences, for sexual difference is both the universal accompaniment of all other lived differences and is one of the means for their transmission and propagation. None of these other differences has the same

relation to the transition from nature to culture — they are all social and cultural — and none of these other forms of social discrimination can propagate itself without the cooperation of sexual difference.⁹ This claim is arguably Irigaray's most contentious.

While this outline has reduced Irigaray's conception to its most elementary formulation, this exercise in outlining the various facets of this dazzling concept may help to explain Irigaray's hostility to those egalitarian projects that have marked much of feminist theory and practice. Any egalitarian project, whether directed to the equalization of relations between the sexes, or between races, classes, or ethnicities, is, for Irigaray, antagonistic to the project of the specification of differences. Egalitarianism entails a neutral measure for the attainment of equality, a measure that invariably reflects the value of the dominant position. Egalitarianism entails becoming equal to a given term, ideal, or value. Irigaray's work on sexual difference, along with the writings of other feminists and antiracists focused on the work of specifying irreducible differences, problematizes any given norm by which sexes or races can be measured independent of the sexes and races thus measured. Equality in its most far-reaching sense involves the creation of multiple norms and the recognition of multiple positions and not the acceptance of a norm or value based on the dominant position, as most forms of egalitarianism entail. It is her anti-egalitarianism, her anti-essentialism and her refusal to privilege the present and the actual over the future and the virtual that mark Irigaray's unique and ongoing contribution to philosophy, and that are key elements of her understanding of sexual difference.¹⁰

Nature and Culture

Sexual difference is what characterizes the natural world, the multiple forms of culture, and the varieties of transition from nature to culture. This is why, for Irigaray, sexual difference is given, not constructed. Yet even as it is given, it must also be lived, created, invented. Nature need not be seen as static or fixed in order to understand that sexual difference characterizes nature and is one of the most striking features of the natural world. Sexual difference is a problem that each culture has no choice but to address, as it must also address the problem of mortality and the problem of cultural inheritance, of how to transmit ways of living from one generation to the next. These are biological contingencies that become cultural necessities.

Irigaray understands that nature itself provides no limit to the social and cultural possibilities of women. For her, the problem is not biology but the ways in which biology has been dominated by masculinist thought: "What has served to exploit women is a biology interpreted in terms more masculine than feminine."¹¹

If we are both natural and cultural beings, if culture is not the supersession and overcoming of nature but instead a coexistence, a mode of mutual engagement and elaboration — the cultural a mode of addressing the natural, and the natural a condition for cultural emergence — then we need other ways to understand nature than as that which we abandon or move beyond. We need a new, dynamized conception of nature that acknowledges that nature itself is continually changing, and thus never static or fixed, and is also a mode of production of change (and thus produces nothing fixed, nothing static or unchanging: nature is itself historical rather than anti-historical). This new conception must also recognize that nature is itself always sexed — that sexual difference marks the world of living things, plant, animal, and human — or that nature itself is at least two. Irigaray explains,

The natural is at least two: male and female. All the speculation about overcoming the natural in the universal forgets that nature is not *one*. In order to go beyond — assuming this is necessary — we should make reality the point of departure; it is *two* (a *two* containing in turn secondary differences: smaller/larger, younger/older, for instance). The universal has been thought as one, thought on the basis of *one*. But this *one* does not exist.

If this *one* does not exist, limit is therefore inscribed in nature itself. Before the question of the need to surpass nature arises, it has to be made apparent that it is *two*. This *two* inscribes finitude in the natural itself. No one nature can claim to correspond to the whole of the natural. There is no "Nature" as a singular entity.¹²

Irigaray develops a new conception of nature, one very different from that found in the history of Western philosophy: instead of seeking a point of origin or departure for the social, she sees in nature the site of productivity. If nature is never one but always at least two, and if it is a mode of becoming rather than a form of being, a mode of temporal change rather than a form of fixity, it may provide a new mode of conceptuality itself.

Irigaray provides us with precisely a philosophy that, while addressing

the question of sexual difference, never loses sight of what is beyond subjectivity and identity and opens us to the larger world, the worlds of nature and culture together. Hers is the beginning of precisely the feminist philosophy of the real, of matter and life, which may help revitalize contemporary feminist thought, although her philosophical trajectory has been a veritable road map of the intellectual and political challenges facing feminist intellectual inventiveness.

Through Irigaray, we are returned to a dynamic and open-ended nature, a nature that, while universal and providing universal questions for culture to address, produces no answers, only modes of elaboration and development. Irigaray elaborates a new understanding of nature as creation, and in the process, she develops new concepts of the movement from nature to culture than those violent forces of mastery, containment, and control posed by masculinist sciences, technologies, and economies. She declares, "Thus it is from the natural that we should start over in order to refound reason. . . . The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least *two*: male and female. This division is not secondary nor unique to human kind. It cuts across all realms of the living which, without it, would not exist. Without sexual difference, there would be no life on earth. It is the manifestation of the condition for the production and reproduction of life."¹³

For Irigaray, the political and cultural task of sexual difference is to become what one is, to socially and conceptually cultivate the being that is given naturally, to create a way of living that opens up and develops that nature that one is and can become (for nature is never fixity but endless resource). Culture is not the overcoming or rewriting of nature but its cultivation, its enhancement and expansion. Culture can be, must be, more than nature's reduction to (deadly) commodity. Through a more adequate recognition of sexual difference, culture is the opening up rather than the containment and control of nature, although of course it contains the homicidal impulses that have thus far characterized a masculine relation to nature. Irigaray explains, "My project is regulated on the basis of my natural identity. The intention is to assure its cultivation so that I may become who I am. Equally, it is to spiritualize my nature in order to create with the other."¹⁴

A new kind of relation between the sexes is only possible if the natural is reconceived in terms other than those which have reduced it to a frozen set of archetypes. The relations constituting the social order — interpersonal

relations, relations of production and creation — are themselves founded on a misrecognized nature, a nature whose openness has been misunderstood. A new series of social relations that more adequately recognize sexual difference involves a new understanding of nature and of the foundational relation between nature and culture: "The difficulties women have in gaining recognition for their social and political rights are rooted in this insufficiently thought out relation between biology and culture. At present, to deny all explanations of a biological kind — because biology has paradoxically been used to exploit women — is to deny the key to interpreting this exploitation."¹⁵

Irigaray recognizes that we need to return to a different concept of nature, not one that reduces nature to human resource or useful commodity, but one that recognizes our connection with and our cultural duty to the natural. Nature offers, for Irigaray, not just a story of origins, the place from which the human begins, a place of prehistory, but a source of renewal and transformation of the cultural. Nature as the other of culture must itself be respected as the place and time by which culture and its human products renew and transform themselves: "Nature is a place of rebirth. Nature is a second mother, but it's also a sexed universe. Nature offers an alternative place for life and sharing in relation to the human world, the manufactured world. Rather than exploit it or forget it, I try to praise it, sing it."¹⁶

The Transition from the One to the Other

Irigaray affirms a positive conception of nature that in no way threatens or undermines the force and power of culture; unlike the vast majority of contemporary feminist work, the anxiety about essentialism or naturalism regarding nature does not appear in her writings. Instead, nature is valorized as a site of renewal and regeneration, as the source of culture and its transformation. The transition from nature to culture interests her much more than the life of sexual difference within nature itself. In this regard, Irigaray remains invested, in spite of her other criticisms of the tradition, in Hegel's understanding of the transition from nature to culture, which has so influenced Marxism, structuralism, and post-Hegelian phenomenology and existentialism. Indeed, modern philosophy itself seems deeply invested in understanding culture as a kind of second-order birth, a second-order nature that rewrites and transforms the first order, the place where the

natural bonds between mother and child are replaced by the loyalties to father, law, and the nation.

In Irigaray's case, this means that sexual difference, as naturally given, must be affirmed and cultivated in culture for it to serve as the basis for a new social order and new modes of democracy. For her, it is clear that Western culture, and patriarchal capitalism in particular (whose rise Hegel chronicles), sees in nature only resources to be conquered, material to be converted into property, used, and used up. Men's labor is directed to the transformation of nature into commodities, and in this process, a natural relation of debt to materiality, to nature, and to the maternal body—all unspoken conditions for the patriarchal subject—is left unrepresented and covered over by conquest. Irigaray explains, "Because of its blindness to the significance of its patriarchal foundations, mankind no longer sees that the privilege of wealth originally concerns men alone. . . . Wealth, understood as the accumulation of property through the exploitation of others, is already the result of the subjugation of one sex to the other. Capitalization is even the organizing force behind patriarchal power *per se*, through the mechanization of our sexually differentiated bodies and the injustice of dominating them."¹⁷

This hostility to nature and to materiality expresses itself in both the desire for the domination over the material world and in the control of men over women. If men "care little about living matter," converting matter into property, creating nature as that which must be dominated, controlled, mined, extended indefinitely, even to "the most distant stars," this helps justify their refusal to recognize woman as other than, separate from, and irreducible to man, to justify their reduction of women as well to commodity form.¹⁸ Here Hegel is significant, for he recognizes that the failure to adequately uplift and transform our relation to nature inevitably affects the forms our cultural productions take. Hegel recognizes that the failure to spiritualize nature, to effect an ethical relation to nature, as Antigone's story testifies, wrenches the entire social order. Irigaray writes, "Men's society is built upon ownership of property. Life itself is treated like a commodity, productive capital, and possessed as a tool of labour, but not as the basis of an identity to be cultivated. Patriarchy cares little about spiritualizing sexually differentiated nature. This perverts its relationship to matter and its cultural organization. Hegel was particularly aware of this shortcoming of an ethics of our relationship with the natural world as it concerns the genders and their ancestries; Antigone is sacrificed because she pays her

respects to the blood and gods of her mother by honouring her dead brother. Hegel wrote that this sacrifice hobbles the whole rest of the becoming of the spirit."¹⁹

Hegel addresses the processes by which nature is sublated into spirit, and animal life, the life of plants and animals, the life that also characterizes sexual difference, is sacrificed, surpassed, and uplifted. The intense immediacy of sexual and family life must give way to the forces of the nation and the processes of sacrifice, death, and mourning that enable the natural family to accede to the universal of spirit through war, through the wrenching of man from a private family order into civic life. But for Hegel, this universal, attainable only when man leaves the family, is produced by cutting man off from his sexual specificity and from his relation to the other sex, rendering him neutral in the process of becoming universal.²⁰ It is, ironically, man's neutralization into citizen, subject, soldier, or philosopher that effects both the illusion of his disembodiment and the need for woman to be restricted to her (bodily or natural) function as nurturer, mother, carer for his body and those of his offspring. Spirit is attainable only at the cost of the sexed specificity of the body and a direct relation to the natural order: spirit is the overcoming of the natural, its transformation into the universal. Irigaray's task is to restore the sexed specificity of the body to not only nature but the processes of culture or spiritualization that transform natural need into social law. As she explains, "Life can only be thought about, guaranteed, protected if we give consideration to *gender* as one constituent of the human race, not only in reproduction but also in culture, spirit."²¹

Instead of the neutralization of sexual and generational specificity that Hegel's account of the family as hinge between nature and culture entails, Irigaray seeks to recognize the sexed forms of nature and to provide a model of culture that builds on rather than neutralizes this specificity. Irigaray seeks a universal that reflects the dual forms of nature itself.²²

She seeks a continuity between the natural and the cultural, the private and the public, the family and the social order, not the split and antagonism that Hegel, and all of phenomenology that follows from him, creates between private life and civic identity, between the interests of sexuality and of social order, between the world of women (mothers) and the world of men. Cultivation of the natural rather than its neutralization and universalization is the task of the social and especially its agent, the family. As the point of transition between the natural and the cultural, the family is not the

site of the abstraction and formalization of the subject-citizen, no matter how strong its task of producing citizens who take on the labor of the creation of spirit. Only if the family in its sexual and natural specificity remains connected to its origins can we have a spiritual or social and civic order that is embodied, sexed, that recognizes at least two sexes instead of a single neutral universal.²³

Another Nature

Irigaray tends to understand nature through this Hegelian lens, as concrete materiality that requires refinement and abstraction to serve as the content for social and civic relations. There is no evidence that Irigaray is interested in or has read Darwin's works, especially in the context of her conception of sexual difference.²⁴ But it may be that Darwin's work can provide her with a richer and more resonant concept of the place of sexual difference in the universal than that provided by the phenomenological and structuralist traditions. Darwin affirms the continuity of the human with the animal and the vegetal, and the continuity between the natural and the cultural. For him, there is no movement from nature to culture, for culture is regulated by the same broad principles as nature. Nature already contains many different forms of culture. In addition, he asserts the centrality of sexual difference—or more accurately, sexual selection, which I will argue is a form of sexual difference—in the life of species. It is only with the publications of Darwin's provocative picture of the web of life adapted through natural and sexual selection that the human's place in nature has finally achieved a kind of scientific and philosophical recognition that affirms man's place in nature as much as in culture. Darwin's understanding of nature supersedes Hegel's, and indeed entirely reorients the trajectory of German nature philosophy.²⁵ According to Darwin, the human's two forms are given in nature but cultivated through culture. Culture is not the completion of nature but rather the experimentation with nature's open possibilities, which include its possibilities for both oppression and liberation.

Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference as a striking characteristic of both nature and culture may be elaborated and developed through Darwin's work on species. A nonreductionist understanding of sexual difference as biological force finds its greatest support in Darwin's writings, and Darwin provides biology with its most open philosophical framework. To the extent that Irigaray's conception of sexual difference may be sharpened and further

elaborated through Darwin's account of sexual selection, I will also claim that Darwin's work is further expanded and made relevant to feminist and other contemporary political concerns through itself being interpreted, not through feminist egalitarianism, which Darwin himself sometimes addresses in both respectful and sarcastic terms, but through a feminism of sexual difference. That is to say, instead of a philosophical framework in which the formal or abstract identities of male and female subjects are treated as if they are or could be the same, a recognition of the irreducible differences between the sexes—and the consequent necessary failure of any but the most abstract forms of equality—would also help to clarify the relevance of Darwin's work for feminist thought. Darwin provides perhaps the most systematic and elaborate explanation for the genesis and near-ubiquity of sexual difference, and thus his work finds an unexpected support in Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference, which may help explain at least some of the unrecognized radicality of Darwin's writings.

Though Irigaray never refers to Darwin's work or to a conception of nature that is dynamized and fully compatible with and inseparable from culture (at least in the case of social animals), she approximates many of his concepts. For example, she distinguishes between something like natural and sexual selection, natural necessities for life and sexual requirements: "Two natural necessities dominate societies. One of them may appear to be neuter, unmarked by the sexual: we all have to breathe, feed, clothe and house ourselves. Our societies are controlled by this need, which, rightful as it is, accords money a power that is totally disproportionate. . . . In addition to need, there is another dimension in the person, that of desire, which is linked to energy, particularly sexual energy. This dimension of the person as sexed is important for social production and reproduction: without it, there is no society. Yet the dignity and necessity of sexual difference goes unrecognized."²⁶

Her distinction between two natural necessities is the distinction between natural selection and sexual selection, between the struggle for existence against natural elements and chance itself and the struggle to attract sexual partners that characterizes sexual selection. These two forces, Irigaray recognizes, are what nature bequeaths to all forms of social organization—the necessity to provide for conditions which sustain life and the necessity of addressing sexual energy and attraction. Cultures may vary immensely in how they address these two necessities, but each must find some way in which these are adequately addressed. Patriarchy is one such

attempt, but by no means the only one possible. Feminism is another. Darwin may provide another concept of nature than the Hegelian framework through which Irigaray understands the transition from nature to culture. And Irigaray may provide a framework for understanding the differences between male and female that will help clarify Darwin's understanding of sexual selection and open it up to new feminist understandings of evolution and biology.

Darwin and Feminism

A philosophical exploration of the concept of sexual selection in Darwin's writings, directed by a commitment to a feminism of irreducible difference, would enable a new nonreductionist understanding of sexual selection as a principle both vital for and irreducible to natural selection. Feminists who are committed to the concept of the irreducible difference between the sexes may find in Darwin's writings surprising confirmation of their claims, as well as a deeper understanding of the relation between nature and culture.

Darwin's own relation to feminism and to women's struggles is quite complex. He is clearly sympathetic to programs of social equalization, especially educational programs, for breaching the social gap between men and women. Along with his friend and correspondent John Stuart Mill, he believed that the index of a culture's openness is the way in which men treat women. Slavery and the denigration of women are, for him, twin evils that exist in both barbarous and developed cultures: "The great sin of Slavery has been almost universal, and slaves have often been treated in an infamous manner. As barbarians do not regard the opinion of their women, wives are commonly treated like slaves. Most savages are utterly indifferent to the sufferings of strangers, or even delight in witnessing them"²⁷

He recognizes that patriarchal power keeps woman in the state of servitude that she shares with man's animals: "Man is more powerful in body and mind than woman, and in the savage state he keeps her in a far more abject state of bondage than does the male of any other animal; therefore it is not surprising that he should have gained the power of selection."²⁸ Darwin also believes that although man is more educated than woman, with the benefit of an intense and rigorous training in both mind and body, woman can, in addition to her skills of procreation and nurturance, become as educated, as civilized, and developed as man.²⁹ This egalitarianism, his clear hostility to the rampant racism of his time, and his commitment to

questions of class — and indeed his warm if guarded relations to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels — were also fervent political commitments of his family. It is hardly surprising that Marxists warmly greeted his account of evolution through natural selection. After the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, Marx wrote to Engels: "Although it is developed in the crude English style, this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view."³⁰ Indeed, Marx clearly felt a very great affinity with Darwin's work on the struggle for existence. He inscribed in Darwin's copy of volume 1 of *Capital*, "Mr. Charles Darwin, on the part of his sincere admirer, Karl Marx, London, 16 June 1873" and offered to dedicate volume 2 to him — an offer Darwin politely declined!

Darwin's own politics was directed to an impulse to consider the sexes, all races, and all classes as fundamentally equal, as governed by degrees rather than by any insurmountable gap. But this may be because a politics of difference had yet to be thought as such. Egalitarianism represented, in his time, the highest aspirations of a culture concerned for the well-being of all its members. Yet the concept of fundamental difference, a difference in bodies, and thus in interests, perspectives, and values, was already emerging in his understanding of animal existence, and would provide the conceptual and historical preconditions for Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference and the proliferation of politics of racial, class, and other differences, and would itself benefit from being interpreted and understood from such a perspective.

Sexual Selection

I have already briefly elaborated Darwin's understanding of sexual selection. While natural selection has privileged sexual reproduction over the forms of asexual reproduction that still characterize some forms of life (bacterial, viral, protozoan), sexual selection is irreducible to natural selection. Natural selection is always ultimately directed by the struggle for existence, the struggle to survive; sexual selection, by contrast, is directed to the struggle to attain sexual partners, and thus the stakes are much less severe and dire. While it is in some sense subordinated to the forces of natural selection, which remain the final arbiter in the assessment of the value of any characteristics, sexual selection is a principle separate from and not reducible to natural selection. Sexual selection is not only a separate principle from natural selection (for it could have never been deduced from

a knowledge of natural selection), it also attenuates and problematizes the criteria by which natural selection operates and substitutes its own, sometimes contrary, principles of taste, attractiveness, or desire. Sexual selection not only complicates natural selection, it has the potential to imperil life, to render various activities or qualities more noticeable, more obvious, and as liable to attract predators as potential sexual partners. As I discussed in the previous chapter, sexual selection regulates many of the perceptible differences between the sexes, but it paradoxically does not direct itself to those sexual differences that lead directly to reproduction, which are regulated by natural selection. All other sexual characteristics, those not directly related to the production and care of the young but rather to attracting sexual partners, are forms of sexual selection, even if these may also serve in some way as forms of advantage in the struggle for existence.³¹

Natural selection privileges some individuals and species over others in the struggle for existence. Sexual selection privileges some members of one sex within a species over others in the struggle to attain desirable sexual partners. Sexual selection tends to differentiate the sexes more and more from each other in appearance. That these are forms of sexual selection rather than natural selection is clear from the fact that both male and females survive equally well though they look and act in increasingly divergent ways over the passage of time. And the less attractive members of either sex would continue to reproduce in lieu of the presence of more attractive members. Sexual selection produces characteristics and activities that are linked to appeal and attraction and to spectacle and display.

As previously mentioned, sexual selection takes two forms. First, it consists in various forms of competition between members of the same sex, usually males (or more rarely, females) for the right to select the sexual partner who appeals most to them. Second, sexual selection also entails forms of (usually) female discernment, in which females select from a number of possible partners those which most appeal to them. This distinction between active male competition and passive female discernment has, not surprisingly, been the object of much (egalitarian) feminist criticism, for it seems to reproduce precisely the most stereotyped images of male and female as oppositional in active (or positive) and passive (or negative) terms. In fact, however, Darwin devotes considerable detail to the analysis of female competition and male discernment, which seems more common in insects, fish, and some species of birds than in higher mammals.³² In any case, for those patriarchs contemporary with Darwin, the very idea of

female discernment was disturbing, for it assumes a degree of intelligence, preference, and choice that is at odds with the assumption that it is males who are the primary force of sexual encounters and that female preferences are of little consequence. (Similar arguments inform the current forms of sociobiological justification of rape as an evolutionary tool, which assume that the only sexual forces are active forces and that these are male.)

Darwin makes a strong argument in favor of female selection. Only female discernment can explain the increasingly different bodily forms of males relative to females; the heritable advantages to particular males granted by their attractiveness to females can intensify and exaggerate these qualities in successive generations. Only female discernment or taste can explain the ongoing existence of extravagant, sometimes even endangering, ornament: "Does the male parade his charms with so much pomp and rivalry for no purpose? Are we not justified in believing that the female exerts a choice, and that she receives the addresses of the male who pleases her most? It is not probable that she consciously deliberates; but she is most excited or attracted by the most beautiful, or melodious, or gallant males."³³ Females are generally both less eager and more discerning in their sexual encounters than males of the same species. The females tend to consider sexual encounters rather than to immediately enact them. Darwin argues that if male competition intensifies the physical capacities, strength, energy, agility, and war-like activities of males, it is female discernment that intensifies male appearance, the production and extension of ornaments, forms of charm, and beauty. Female discernment intensifies male beauty and attractiveness, sometimes even at the cost of male survival.³⁴

Darwin develops a number of arguments for the distinctness of sexual selection from natural selection. According to him, the attributes produced as a result of sexual selection generally have five qualities.³⁵ First, they are much more marked in adults than in the young; in particular, the qualities of adult maleness are often attenuated or difficult to observe in the young and only emerge after sexual maturity. Second, they tend to be inherited by offspring of the same sex: males tend to inherit those characteristics that mark their male progenitors; females, the same with their female progenitors. Although Darwin was unaware of genes and their role in the inheritance of characteristics, he was acutely aware of the inheritance of phenotypic forms. Without characteristics' tendency to be inherited, sexual selection would not accumulate characteristics but would function only for the current generation. Third, the attributes resulting from sexual selection

are increasingly intensified as time progresses; that is, the sexes are less and less alike with the passage of time. Fourth, sexual selection characterizes not only many perceptible qualities of the body, but also character traits, forms of personality, and modes of activity, meaning it functions with both the products of body and those of mind. And finally, sexual selection functions primarily through subjective qualities — taste, appeal, and what is attractive and alluring for its own sake. This may coincide with a discernment of fitness but it may not. Sexual selection elevates the artistic, the gratuitous, the ornamental, for its own sake, for the sake of pleasure or beauty, even to the point of imperiling the more beautiful and noticeable individuals over their less beautiful competitors. Sexual selection both augments and problematizes natural selection.

It is because the concept of sexual selection in Darwin's writings is so closely linked to taste, the discernment of beauty, and the appeal of the ornamental, the secondary, and the frivolous that there has been an enormous investment in contemporary evolutionary theory to explain sexual selection as a form of unconscious or indirect natural selection. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, Darwin is right to keep separate from the discussion the (relative) usefulness of those attributes acquired through natural selection, for they function according to contrary principles and have very different effects. Sexual selection is primarily creative. It enhances, elaborates, and exaggerates individual differences to make them as enticing and appealing as possible. It complicates and intensifies attractive individual differences. Natural selection, by contrast, is primarily negative. It tests and eliminates the less fit rather than privileging the more fit. Sexual selection relies on altogether different criteria than those regulating natural selection — not the impersonal criteria of random chance, but the highly individually variable criteria of attractiveness. Darwin suggests that it is sexual selection that maximizes difference, that generates individual variation, and that guarantees that offspring will be different from their parents, even as they share certain of their qualities. Sexual selection is the engine for the creation of those differences that natural selection evaluates.

Barnacles and the Origin of Sexual Selection

While the origin of sexual selection only occupies a few pages of *The Descent of Man* (I:207–11), it is a question that clearly fascinated Darwin. In spite of his reserving a detailed discussion of sexual selection until the publication

of that work in 1871, sexual selection was in fact one of Darwin's earliest hypotheses — the one that served to distinguish him most clearly from the many other naturalists also working at roughly the same time on the mutability of the species. Already in his travels on the HMS *Beagle*, he was fascinated with those organs, appendages, and activities that seem to have no direct bearing on an individual's capacity to survive but are linked to sexual attraction. In his third and fourth notebooks, he addresses the question of the origin of sexual dimorphism. And in his joint publication with A. R. Wallace, *Evolution by Natural Selection*, where he first publicly presents his research on natural selection (while Wallace makes no mention of sexual selection), Darwin "devotes a disproportionately large section to it,"³⁶ which implies that he wanted both to emphasize its importance as well as to mark out in advance his differences from Wallace's position.

As is well known, he held off publication of both *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* for a number of years, fearing both the reception of these works and the need to demonstrate his empirical and observational credentials before presenting his quite wild and philosophically oriented understanding of the historically aimless movement of evolution. What is perhaps less well known is that after he had drafted an early version of *On the Origin of Species* but before he published it, and well before the publication of *The Descent of Man*, he devoted an immense amount of time — eight years — to an analysis of a lowly creature, the barnacle. One might see this work as a distraction from the anxieties surrounding the publication of what Darwin understood would be profoundly contentious claims about the transmutation of species. However, it should be noted that his work on barnacles, which admittedly took a good deal longer than he had expected, was in part directed to major revisions in the taxonomy and categorization of barnacles, but was largely directed to an analysis of the origins of sexual selection and the very peculiar forms of sexuality that were revealed by his laborious observation, dissection, and analysis of the vast range of living and fossil barnacles. In this process, he became the world authority on barnacles, and his four monographs on the topic remain even today an "indispensable reference" for those interested in the topic.³⁷

Darwin does discuss the possible origins of sexual bifurcation briefly in *The Descent of Man*, where he speculates on the origin of certain vestigial or rudimentary organs of the one sex being found in the other sex. This phenomenon is quite striking in the case of the embryos of many species, but there are also clearly traces of the other sex, such as nipples in males, that

occur in mature individuals.³⁸ The existence of such organs attests to "some extremely remote progenitor of the whole vertebrate kingdom [that] appears to have been hermaphrodite or androgynous."³⁹ The earliest ancestors of sexually bifurcated species, he speculates, may have included the reproductive organs of both sexes within a single form. Mammalian life may have descended from earlier forms that were organically bisexual. The sexes divided before mammals as a category were distinguished from their progenitors,⁴⁰ Darwin suggests, and each sex still carries the rudiments of its preceding premammalian androgynous state. It is perhaps his fascination with this question, raised so briefly in *The Descent of Man*, that directed him to the laborious investigation, by no means a detour, into the evolutionary history of the barnacle.

Barnacles have many peculiarities—their anatomy and morphology, and their variety and scope—which were largely unknown when Darwin began his researches. One question that fascinated him was the genealogical relation between barnacles and other crustaceans. Barnacles were insensibly differentiated from crustaceans over a vast period of time, and Darwin hypothesized that their capacity to secrete a glue-like substance and to permanently cement themselves onto various surfaces, one of their characteristic but not universal features in the present, may have derived from a sticky substance, present in crustaceans, that lines the female barnacle's tract. Darwin suggests that the contemporary barnacle is descended from an ancestral barnacle that was hermaphroditic and was itself the indirect offspring of crustaceans, which may explain how barnacles acquired their cementing capacities but would not explain how male barnacles can attach themselves either to objects, as do the females, or, most importantly, to females in order to engender reproduction. Darwin wanted to know how male barnacles had acquired some of the characteristics of female crustaceans. Much of Darwin's detailed work provides intermediate examples, drawn from fossilized barnacles, that could explain the sequences of anatomical transmutation that transformed hermaphroditic ancestors into the two sexes. What Darwin discovered was that many of the barnacle fossils, especially the oldest, exhibit an hermaphroditic anatomy, but, more peculiarly and surprisingly, some quite rare contemporary forms of barnacle still appear to be hermaphrodites, though with male organs that are "microscopically small" and in the process of atrophying. In addition, these largely female contemporary hermaphrodites had various small parasites attached to them, which turned out, on closer inspection, to be dwarf males, males in

the processes of emerging as a separate sex but which were still largely primitive modes of insemination, little more than sacks of sperm.⁴¹ In one and the same species, then, there are hermaphrodites, which are largely female with atrophying male organs, and there are female barnacles and tiny parasitic males without well developed organs, males in the process of developing.

Although hermaphrodites (both in the plant kingdom and among various sea creatures) have the possibility of self-fertilization, Darwin has argued that this rarely occurs. Hermaphrodites generally cross-fertilize. Sessile or immovable animals, such as the barnacle (or Darwin's other favorite, coral), grow their shells directly onto a fixed place and, after this attachment, are not able to move. Thus barnacles can only exchange sperm with their nearest neighbors. If their nearest neighbor is one of two sexes, then there is only a 50 percent chance that a male and female will be in proximity to each other. With two hermaphroditic individuals, the possibilities for cross-fertilization are greatly enhanced for any two individuals in proximity. And the emergence of complementary males, males which attach themselves to the female or hermaphrodite to live parasitically, also increases the likelihood of cross-fertilization from what exists for two separate and autonomous sexes. In addition, the male barnacle, even when of dwarf stature, is known to have an extraordinarily long penis (the largest penis size to body ratio of any animal⁴²), which maximizes the chances of fertilization. Having both types of morphologies only further enhances the likelihood of reproduction. This indeed may explain the remarkable evolutionary stability of barnacles, which have well over 1,200 species, which differ widely in their anatomical structure and in their reproductive relations.

As primitive sea creatures, barnacles are very much like the earliest forms of life to appear after the emergence of animals from plants (and their bisexual structure attests to this). Yet barnacles are also pervasive, to be found along every coastline and tidal location across the globe. Some barnacle fossils are as old as 500 million years, while many have stable forms that can be dated back 20 million years. Darwin hypothesizes a genealogy of contemporary barnacle forms from an originally hermaphroditic barnacle ancestor, an ancestor that emerged by slow degrees of change from the crustaceans as distinctively and uniquely hermaphroditic. The question was: how and why did this hermaphroditic creature become a sexually differentiated one?

In his exploration of the stalked barnacle *Ibla*, common in the Philip-

pinus, Darwin discovered only females in all of his dissections. It was only when he turned his attention to the tiny parasites on the body of the *Ibla* that he understood that these parasites were tiny males—very primitive creatures with no mouth and no digestive system, little more than living insemination tubes—attached to or burrowed into the female's body. Yet when he dissected an Australian *Ibla*, he discovered, along with females, some hermaphroditic specimens. Both females and hermaphrodites had complementary males burrowed into their bodies, which in no way resembled either female or hermaphroditic morphologies. They resembled no other animal forms, though they did resemble species "in the Vegetable Kingdom."⁴³

The *Ibla* provided a concrete illustration of the sequence of evolutionary elaboration. First came the ancient progenitors of today's vast range of barnacles and barnacle forms, hermaphroditic barnacles, which are still quite prevalent even today. Then emerged barnacles like the *Ibla*, which represent a transitional stage. Hermaphrodites incorporate male organs in the process of atrophy, as well as robust female organs, for their function can now be assured with the emergence of these complementary or parasitic males. Eventually these hermaphroditic male organs will either disappear or become vestigial (much like the atrophied stamen and pistil of hermaphroditic plants). Through gradual, imperceptible changes come separately sexed barnacles, the females resulting from the hermaphroditic forms, and the males emerging as complementary to the female (a kind of reverse patriarchy!). These complementary males are not truly autonomous, for they usually have no modes of sustenance, ingestion, or digestion. They are neither entirely autonomous nor entirely submerged in and part of the female or hermaphroditic body. They remain parasitic.⁴⁴ These species are currently in the slow process of transforming from hermaphroditic to bisexual and then to two separate sexes, which have emerged with stalked barnacles.⁴⁵

What emerges from Darwin's analysis of barnacles is the story of the half-emergence of maleness, not femaleness, whose reproductive capacity must be marked somewhere in the living being. The significant question is less how do living beings (plants and animals) reproduce themselves, for in order for life to emerge at all, the (female) capacity for generation must be assumed; the question is really, why is there a second force of generation? Why is there maleness? What advantages does the emergence of a separate form of maleness create? Why, in other words, does sexual selection erupt?

What advantage does sexual selection bring such that it generates more than one body type, more than one form of inheritance?

For Darwin, the answer is clear. Sexual bifurcation, the eruption of more than one (by default, female) sex, is a strategy to maximize the potential for variation, to maximize the forms of living beings, to maximize difference itself. Natural selection selected the strategy of dividing the sexes into (at least) two bodies rather than a single morphological type—not for all forms of life, especially those invested in evolutionarily stable environments, but for those involved in changing situations. Sexual selection is the most reliable reproductive strategy in a large number of contexts, for plants and animals, because it provides the conditions under which the greatest variety of living beings can be produced from which the fittest, or the most contextually embedded, can be selected to produce the next generation in greater numbers than their less fit or embedded counterparts. Sexual bifurcation is privileged by natural selection as a means for maximizing the survival of some if not all the members of a particular species; that is, as a mode of differentiation that guarantees the maximization of differences between individuals. And in turn, sexual selection functions to deflect natural selection through its extravagant and excessive pleasures, its inventions and intensifications of new relations, new forms of attraction, and new modes of artfulness. Sexual selection is arguably the greatest invention of natural selection.

Darwin claims that it is responsible, not only for the vast range of variations of life on earth, but also for the creation of a kind of arms war that intensifies the value of certain qualities, those that are sexually alluring and attractive, and gives them a disproportionate value over other qualities, which may not be warranted in terms of natural selection alone. It is responsible for the intensification of beauty over generations and for the proliferation of colors, sounds, and forms that are pleasing to members of one's own species. Darwin even suggests that sexual selection has played a powerful role in the creation of the human, whose present form is not only a result of biological survival strategies but even more the consequence of forms of appeal and pleasure that account for many of the perceptible features we still find appealing today: those linked to racial differences, to degrees of hairiness, to the timbre of the voice, to height, strength, grace, and other tangible qualities.

So is Darwin in fact the first theorist, the first feminist, of sexual difference? Although clearly for him sexual difference is not irreducible insofar as it is derived in a slow, even imperceptible movement from anterior forms of existence, nevertheless sexual difference, di- or polymorphism, once it erupts as a random invention of life, comes to characterize most of life in increasingly marked terms. Once hermaphroditic or female forms elaborate the possibility of other morphologies of the same species as their forms of variation, sexual difference is increasingly marked, emphasized, and each sex is sent on its own specific trajectory, never to be reconciled in a single entity again. Sexual difference is the random development that alters the course of life as we know it, deflecting all other forms of evaluation and selection through the inexplicable, incalculable vagaries of taste, desire, appeal.

Sexual bifurcation establishes a problem for all forms of life: how to engender life, given that life is no longer self-perpetuating; that life, whether natural or social, now requires at least two? How to engender sexual attraction, sexual selection, and the production, with variation, of new generations? Darwin addressed these questions very carefully, slowly, and with immense detail, because it is not only in the world of animal existence that they are relevant. These are of course also the most basic questions for human life. His reluctance to address human sexual selection in any but the briefest terms, articulating only the broadest descriptive differences between the sexes, is by now well known. This was much less his terrain of expertise than the activities and physiologies of plants and animals, even though some of his other work—his notes on the early development of his own children, his detailed observation of his daughter Annie's prolonged illness, and his writings on the expression of emotions (*The Expression of the Emotions* [1872])—evinces his astute powers of observation and reflection in the field of human affairs as well. He largely refrains from much speculation on human sexual relations and human forms of attraction (though these forms of attraction do provide a detailed explanation of racial differences).

Irigaray of course has no such hesitation. The domain of human relations and especially the relations between the sexes are the objects of her intense analysis. Although she does occasionally mention animal and plant relations, she only addresses them in passing and in relation to how they illuminate the position of woman in phallogocentric cultures.⁴⁶ There can be no direct reconciliation between Irigaray and Darwin to the extent that

each is implicated in quite different projects—Irigaray in philosophy and addressing only the human, Darwin in biology and addressing the animal. Yet it may be that by a kind of cross-fertilization, the work of each can be sharpened, made more conceptually incisive, more broadly relevant.

If Darwin's work can be understood, not in the context of the egalitarianism that defined the horizon of radical thought in the sexually and class-stratified society of his time, but through Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference, then it will be broadened and made relevant for contemporary political accounts of difference. Read in opposition to the idea of a neutral norm by which both sexes can be socially assessed, Darwin's work can be understood as an analysis of the proliferation of nothing but differences: differences without any hierarchical order, without fixed identities or biological archetypes; differences generated for their own sake and evaluated only through social and natural contingency; differences without norm, without inherent value. These are different experiments in living that are broadly evaluated through their survival capacities. Darwin's understanding of the production of variation is fundamentally embedded in his understanding of sexual selection. Sexual selection proliferates differences as asexual reproduction cannot. Sexual selection must be understood as the creation of differences without clear models, without pre-given boundaries, differences that have value in themselves for the range of variations they bring to natural (and artificial) selection as possibilities to select from.

If Irigaray's work can be understood not only in sociocultural and linguistic terms but also in terms of the biology of lived bodies, then she would not need to account for a transition between nature and culture, which figures so centrally in her more recent writings, or to use the dialectical movement beyond nature in order to explain how social and cultural life are possible. Culture is not the movement away from nature, its overcoming, supersession, or transformation, but the complication of nature, the functioning of the same broad principles to regulate social and cultural relations that structure natural relations. Irigaray's account of sexual difference as that which has been elided by patriarchal cultures but is nevertheless their unacknowledged condition and which must have its day is only confirmed and strengthened through Darwin's understanding of the pervasive and productive role of sexual selection in the proliferation of differences in nature. It is the force of the natural that insists on sexual difference, and that is a kind of assurance of its return in culture in spite of any forces directed to its repression (the promise of feminism itself).

Irigaray's work has been painstakingly defended as cultural and political rather than natural or anatomical in its analysis. But if a more complex and nuanced account of nature—such as Darwin himself provides—is acknowledged, then concepts of nature need not be tied to essentialism or naturalism. Nature itself is dynamized, historical, and subject to dramatic change. Sexual difference remains the most creative and powerful means by which this transformation is brought about. It is the means by which the natural cultivates culture, rather than culture cultivating nature. We do not leave nature behind, we do not surround ourselves with culture in order to protect ourselves against nature, for culture, cultures in their multiplicity, are complex forms of variation of natural forces, both human and animal.

If Irigaray's work is interpreted through the work of Darwin rather than Hegel, and if Darwin's work is interpreted through the work Irigaray rather than John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, and British egalitarianism, then each is modified through the influence of the other. Each is able to displace the concepts that limit or inadequately frame the implications of their respective positions. Darwin's work is opened to a nonreductive politics of (racial, sexual, ethnic, class) difference, and made relevant to a political analysis of cultural relations. Irigaray's work is strengthened, fortified through the incontestable place of sexual difference as a natural force that is culturally registered, which makes it clear that sexual difference is not just one social difference among many but that form of difference that makes all other lived differences possible, the engine of all lived differences.

Sexual difference is ineliminable, the force that proliferates all social and natural relations. Sexual selection refers to the possible erotic relations and encounters of sexes (whether within one sex, between two, or across a number of sexes), and these sexes themselves are separated by difference. Sexual difference is made more visible and perceptible over time as the sexes diverge further from each other. Sexual selection is how sexual difference transforms itself, intensifies itself, and selects the most attractive, noticeable forms, new ideals, and new types of body, qualities, and activities. Sexual selection enhances sexual difference and sexual difference proliferates and varies itself through sexual selection. While different, they operate hand in hand to complexify social and natural life and to divide and increasingly differentiate populations. Irigaray and Darwin have each come to a point of commonness in which different bodies, divided along the lines of sex, become the means for new natural and cultural relations, the road to new forms of politics and new forms of life.



Art and the Animal

The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark. Property, collective or individual, is derived from that, even when it is in the service of war and oppression. Property is fundamentally artistic because art is fundamentally *poster, placard*.

In truth, there are only inhumanities, humans are made exclusively of inhumanities, but very different ones, of very different natures and speeds.

— GILLES DELEUZE AND FÉLIX GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus*

I have outlined in considerable detail the intimate internal connections between man and the animal preconditions of man. Darwinism has opened up a way to engage with animal forces as those with which our own forces participate, and which direct us to a humanity that is always in the process of overcoming and transforming itself. It is the animal forces in us that direct us to what is regarded as most human about us—our ability to represent, to signify, to imagine, to wish for and make ideals, goals, aims. It is the animal in us that, ironically, directs us to art, to the altruistic, to ethics, and to politics. It is animals' modes of coexistence, their modes of difference, their direct encounters with nonliving forces and materialities that guide our own. Rather than explaining human creativity and productivity through the rise of intelligence, reason, and the attainment of higher, more ennobling goals, as philosophies from the Enlightenment suggested, Darwin enabled

nal grandfather, the famous potter Josiah Wedgwood, vehemently opposed to slavery, but Wedgwood even “manufactured hundreds of copies of a cameo showing a black slave in chains with the words ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ . . . On slavery, Charles never wavered . . . It makes one’s blood boil, yet heart tremble, to think that we Englishmen and our American descendants, with their boastful cry of liberty, have been and are so guilty.” Quoted in Gruber, *Darwin on Man*, 66–67.

27. Darwin is firm in his claim that racial variations in man are not simply the result of natural selection or the direct effects of the environment: “If . . . we look to the races of man, as distributed over the world, we must infer that their characteristic differences cannot be accounted for by the direct action of different conditions of life, even after exposure to them for an enormous period of time.” Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2:246.
28. Race and racial characteristics are highly appealing and thus are sexually sought out characteristics: “As the newly-born infants of the most distinct races do not differ nearly as much in colour as do the adults, although their bodies are completely destitute of hair, we have some slight indication that the tints of the different races were acquired subsequent to the removal of the hair, which . . . must have occurred at a very early period.” Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2:382.

NINE. *Sexual Difference as Sexual Selection*

1. Irigaray has always been suspicious of the attempts, primarily in the work of Derrida and Deleuze (and Guattari), to elaborate a politics of “becoming woman,” in which sexual difference, while being abstractly recognized, is nonetheless continually undermined by men’s attempts to “become woman” without the adequate recognition that such a becoming woman is at best a fantasy while it functions through the everyday operations of a male morphology. She urges men to cease becoming women and to begin becoming a new kind of man:

As far as I am concerned, “becoming woman” or “becoming a woman” correspond to [a cultivation of] my own identity, the identity which is mine by birth. For Deleuze, it amounts to becoming what he is not by birth. If I appeal to a return to nature, to the body — that is, to values that our Western culture has scorned — Deleuze acts in the opposite way: according to him it would be possible and suitable to become someone or something which is without relation to my original and material belonging. How could this be possible above all from the part of a man with respect to becoming woman? Putting on the stereotypes concerning

femininity? Deleuze would want to become the woman who Simone de Beauvoir did not want to become? (Irigaray, *Conversations*, 79)

2. Sexual difference is the most elementary division of the human: “Whether through collective psychosis or cynicism, sexual difference, which constitutes the most basic human reality, is treated like an almost non-existent problem.” Irigaray, *Thinking the Difference*, ix.
3. Biology plays a major role in the transmission and lived experience of the sexed body, but biology isn’t the most significant determinant. It is the way that biology is lived, its meaning, that is more important for Irigaray: “Obviously I do not agree with the expression used by Freud in reference to the feminine condition, ‘Anatomy is destiny.’ The use made of it is at once authoritarian, final and devalorizing for woman.” Irigaray, *Conversations*, 5.
4. All current scientific research, for example, which seeks out a measure of sexuality, desire, or pleasure of the two sexes in relation to each other, has been unable to understand the position of both sexes: “Despite the stir it provokes, the question of sexual difference has not yet satisfactorily been treated at the scientific level. When research is done on the distinctive traits of each sex, or each gender, it gives rise to comparisons, oppositions, or measurements. There has as yet been no questioning of difference itself, or of the way it determines the attraction between woman and man.” Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 77.
5. Bodily differences between the two sexes, biologically given but psychically elaborated, for Irigaray mean that there is always a sexual and erotic division or interval between the sexes: “Woman engenders *in herself*, makes love *in herself*. Man engenders and makes love *outside of himself*. This means that their relationship to themselves and their relationship to the other are far from being similar, favoring either the inside *or* the outside, either refuge in oneself *or* respect for the other outside of oneself.” Irigaray, “The Time of Difference,” 96.
6. For Irigaray, sexual difference facilitates the transition from nature to culture as no other difference can: “Sexuate difference is the most basic and the most universal difference. It is also the difference which operates, or ought to operate, each time, the connection between nature and culture for everyone. This connection is specific to girl and woman in comparison with boy and man.” Irigaray, *Conversations*, 77.
7. All of Irigaray’s works over the last two decades or more have addressed the ways in which culture is the ultimate achievement of sexual difference: “Engendering in difference is not limited to procreation: culture, community, the word are also engendered by two. This presupposes an elevating of sexual difference to the level of a sexuate subjectivity and not to let it remain as a simple biological corporeal reality.” Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 157.

8. It is through the other that we come to occupy a collective world: "From birth, men and women belong to different worlds, biologically and relationally, which they'll cultivate in their own ways if they stay faithful to their gender and avoid assuming a neutral identity." Irigaray, "The Time of Difference," 96.
9. Sexual difference is the point of transmission of all other differences, which, while not reducible to reproduction, nevertheless rely on it: All political differences, whether they involve class, race, ethnic, and religious considerations, entail and are the consequence of sexual difference:

A nature that was not respected as such, but subjected to male instincts and passions [is a] nature that man persists in wanting to control, and despise, beyond the wife and the child, in the other race, the other ethnic community and all that reminds him of a natural belonging. As long as the other is not recognized and respected as a bridge between nature and culture, a bridge that gender at first is, every attempt to establish a democratic globalization will remain a moral imperative without concrete fulfillment. As long as the universal is not considered as being two, and humanity as being a place of fruitful coexistence between two irreducibly different genders, a culture will never stop imposing its colour and values upon another, including through its morality and religion. (Irigaray, *Sharing the World*, 134)

While sexual difference does not cause or explain all other social differences, it provides a necessary mode of engagement which has profound implications for how all social minorities are understood and treated: "In the entire world, there exists only men and women. To succeed in treating democratically this universal reality is a way to accomplish the task that the development of civilizations constrains us to carry out. It is interesting to note, related to this, that certain differences between cultures come from more or less hierarchical treatments of the relations between the genders, at the horizontal or genealogical level. Abolishing the rights and privileges of one gender over another signifies therefore working for the possibility of a world culture." Irigaray, *Conversations*, 18.

10. Irigaray recognizes that sexual difference has been relegated to the precultural, to the natural and the animal. As the point of transition from nature to culture, it is nevertheless the condition for all social and cultural forms, however much these have failed to consider sexual difference:

Even today, any questioning about the cultural status of the difference between the sexes comes up against the stumbling block of it being considered purely natural, and thus as the purview of biology. Or of sociology, insofar as sociology deals with group relations more or less linked to nature: family gregariousness, power, etc.

Sexual difference is thus relegated to the status of a biological destiny, or to relations of domination-exploitation related to it. It is obvious that the fight for gender equality is not sufficient to overcome this state of affairs. All the more so since what we understand by "equality" is not so clear. To whom or what should women become equal in order to free themselves from their age-old subjugation? . . . In reality, equality between the sexes or genders tends to deny the existence of difference, rather than solve the problems difference poses. Even in terms of rights, it makes more sense to speak of equivalence rather than equality. Egalitarianism—like the reduction of sexual difference to a biological or sociological given—forgets that sexual difference represents an important dimension in subjectivity that is crucial for relational life. What are humans, if not a species capable of relationships that are not subject to instinct? (Irigaray, *Key Writings*, 77–78)

Irigaray's critique of egalitarianism is wide-ranging and long-term. Her claim, in brief, is that equality is at best a formal aim but is impossible to attain insofar as it must abstract from the real conditions of bodily life. In her words, "To become equal is to be unfaithful to the task of incarnating our happiness as living women and men. Equality neutralizes that dimension of the negative which opens up an access to the alliance between the genders." Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 15.

11. Irigaray, *Conversations*, 5.
12. Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 35.
13. *Ibid.*, 37.
14. *Ibid.*, 39.
15. Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, 46.
16. Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 118–19.
17. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 16.
18. *Ibid.*, 16, 5.
19. *Ibid.*, 16.
20. As Irigaray says, "Woman must leave her family, her home, her name, to take those of her husband. Even the child of her flesh will bear the name of her husband's genealogy. Abducted from her ancestors, particularly her mother, she is consigned to the natural immediacy of reproduction. Motherhood, in turn, is valued only if it is the bearing of *sons*, not daughters. Thus the family falls back in various ways into nonspiritualized nature. . . . Citizens as a gender are cut off from their roots in the body, even as they remain bound, as bodies, to their mother-nature. Unable to resolve this issue, they let it determine their relations with women, whom they restrict to the role of the mothers." *Ibid.*, 136.

21. *Ibid.*, 132. Karen Burke provides a succinct characterization of Irigaray's broad claim: "[Irigaray] calls for sexed rights to replace the neuter rights we have now. Developing civil identities as both masculine and feminine instead of a neuter citizenship, developing masculine and feminine universals instead of relegating the feminine and the body to the private realm, would mean, claims Luce Irigaray, that women would begin to develop a public subjectivity honest to their natural inclinations without reducing them to a naturality, to the naked capacity for bearing children." Burke, "Masculine and Feminine Approaches to Nature," 197.
22. Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 50–51.
23. For Irigaray:
- This absence of any dialogue within the couple, this failure of sexual dialectic (on condition of rethinking the senses of the method), perverts the spirit of the individual, of the family, of the race. The concrete, which Hegel seeks in the individual, has its sexual dimension cut away. The individual is already *abstract*. This abstractness forces us to think of the family as an undifferentiated substance and not as the place of individualization, of a spiritual differentiation that can occur only if there is some polemic between the sexes. The suppression of this miniwar between living beings operates by reducing woman as woman to silence, by equating women as mothers with nature, and by obliging them to sit on their hands rather than act as citizens with an active, open and responsible role to play in building the city. The passage to the race has been perverted, falsified, in its relation to life. (Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 137)
24. I asked her directly in 2008 whether the work of Darwin interested her philosophically, and Irigaray looked at me as if I had asked if she worshipped the devil! It seems clear that it hadn't!
25. This is, in part, the object of investigation of Timothy Lenoir's book, *The Strategy of Life*.
26. Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 50.
27. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1:94.
28. *Ibid.*, 2:366–67. It must also be noted that, in spite of a well-intentioned commitment to a broad egalitarianism, his understanding of the relations between men and women is in fact quite ambivalent. He affirms in certain places that women are less intellectual, less detached, and more sympathetic and warm than men. At times he affirms women's social qualities as if they were biological qualities. However, at other times he seems to acknowledge that social pressures exert a considerable force in transforming character traits and personal abilities. He claims:

Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness; and this holds good even with savages, as shewn by a well-known passage in Mungo Park's *Travels*, and by statements made by many other travellers. Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she should often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright. It is generally admitted that with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation.

The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than woman can attain—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands. If two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, music,—comprising composition and performance, history, science, and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear comparison. We may also infer, from the law of the deviation of averages, so well illustrated by Mr. Galton, in his work on "Hereditary Genius," that if men are capable of decided eminence over women in many subjects, the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman. (Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2: 326–27)

29. Darwin argues that it is the social treatment of women that requires transformation if women are to attain the preeminence of some men:

In order that woman should reach the same standard as man, she ought, when nearly adult, to be trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her reason and imagination exercised to the highest point; and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters. The whole body of women, however, could not be thus raised, unless during many generations the women who excelled in the above robust virtues were married, and produced offspring in larger numbers than other women. As before remarked with respect to bodily strength, although men do not now fight for the sake of obtaining wives, and this form of selection has passed away, yet they generally have to undergo, during manhood, a severe struggle in order to maintain themselves and

their families; and this will tend to keep up or even increase their mental powers, and, as a consequence, the present inequality between the sexes. (Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2:329)

30. Marx, quoted in Gruber, *Darwin on Man*, 71.

31. In some cases, the position or placement of sexual and reproductive organs may influence both sexual and natural selection—natural selection may take advantage of what is produced by sexual selection:

The female often differs from the male in having organs for the nourishment or protection of her young, as the mammary glands of mammals, and the abdominal sacks of the marsupials. The male, also, in some few cases differs from the female in possessing analogous organs, as the receptacles for the ova possessed by the males of certain fishes, and those temporarily developed in certain male frogs. Female bees have a special apparatus for collecting and carrying pollen, and their ovipositor is modified into a sting for the defence of their larvæ and the community. In the females of many insects the ovipositor is modified in the most complex manner for the safe placing of the eggs. . . . There are, however, other sexual differences quite disconnected with the primary organs with which we are more especially concerned—such as the greater size, strength, and pugnacity of the male, his weapons of offence or means of defence against rivals, his gaudy colouring and various ornaments, his power of song, and other such characters. (Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2:254.)

32. *Ibid.*, 2:272.

33. *Ibid.*, 2:123.

34. Sexual selection as a form of display also involves a potential cost, that of being observed by others. As Darwin claims:

It is certain that the females occasionally exhibit, from unknown causes, the strongest antipathies and preferences for particular males. When the sexes differ in colour or in other ornaments, the males with rare exceptions are the most highly decorated, either permanently or temporarily during the breeding-season. They sedulously display their various ornaments, exert their voices, and perform strange antics in the presence of the females. Even well-armed males, who, it might have been thought, would have altogether depended for success on the law of battle, are in most cases highly ornamented; and their ornaments have been acquired at the expense of some loss of power. In other cases ornaments have been acquired, at the cost of increased risk from birds and beasts of prey. (*Ibid.*, 2:123)

35. For further details, see *The Descent of Man*, 2:316–26.

36. Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method*, 219. See also Darwin and Wallace, *Evolution by Natural Selection*.

37. Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method*, 104.

38. Darwin claims, “The mammary glands and nipples, as they exist in male mammals, can indeed hardly be called rudimentary; they are simply not fully developed and not functionally active. They are sympathetically affected under the influence of certain diseases, like the same organs in the female. At birth they often secrete a few drops of milk; and they have been known occasionally in man and other mammals to become well developed, and to yield a fair supply of milk.” Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1:210–11.

39. *Ibid.*, 1:207. He continues, “In the mammalian class the males possess in their vesiculæ prostraticæ rudiments of a uterus with the adjacent passage; they bear also rudiments of mammæ, and some male marsupials have rudiments of a marsupial sack” (1:208).

40. *Ibid.*, 1:208.

41. In a letter to his friend Joseph Dalton Hooker, Darwin explains his discovery of the emergence of maleness in a particular barnacle species:

I have lately got a bisexual cirripede, the male being microscopically small and parasitic within the sack of the female. I tell you of this to boast of my species theory, for the nearest closely allied genus to it is, as usual, hermaphrodite, but I had observed some minute parasites adhering to it, and these parasites I now can show are supplemental males, the male organs in the hermaphrodite being unusually small, though perfect and containing zoosperms: so we have almost a polygamous animal, simple females alone being wanting. I never should have made this out, had not my species theory convinced me, that an hermaphrodite species must pass into a bisexual species by insensibly small stages; and here we have it, for the male organs in the hermaphrodite are beginning to fail, and independent males ready formed. (Darwin, quoted in Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method*, 115)

42. See Stott, *Darwin and the Barnacle*, 85.

43. Darwin, quoted in *ibid.*, 100.

44. As Darwin affirms: “The whole [male] animal is reduced to an envelope . . . containing the testes, vesicula, & penis. In male *Ibla*, we have hardly any cirri or thorax; in some male *Scalpellums* no mouth. . . . I believe that males occur on every female; in one case I found 12 males & two pupæ on point of metamorphosis permanently attached by cement to one female!” Darwin, letter to Hancock, quoted in *ibid.*, 213.

In the case of his most fascinating object of study, the *Arthrobalanus*,

Darwin explains: "The probosciform penis is wonderfully developed, so that in *Cryptophialus*, when fully extended, it must equal between eight and nine times the entire length of the animal! These males . . . consist of a mere bag, lined by a few muscles, enclosing an eye, and attached to the lower end by the pupal antennae. . . . [I]t has an orifice at its upper end, and within it there lies coiled up, like a great worm, the probosciformed penis. . . . [T]here is no mouth, no stomach, no thorax, no abdomen, and no appendages or limbs of any kind. . . . I know of no other animal in the animal kingdom with such an amount of abortion." Darwin, from *A Monograph of the Sub-Class Cirripedia*, quoted in *ibid.*, 220.

45. As Darwin explains in a letter to John Stevens Henslow, "But here comes the odd fact, the male or sometimes two males, at the instant they cease being locomotive larvae become parasitic within the sack of the female, & thus fixed & half embedded in the flesh of their wives they pass their whole lives & can never move again. Is it not strange that nature should have made this one genus unisexual & yet have fixed the males on the outside of the females?" Letter quoted in *ibid.*, 101.
46. See, for example, "Introducing: Love between Us" from *I Love to You*, where she discusses plants and flowers (34, 38), as well as *Animal Philosophies*.

TEN. *Art and the Animal*

1. See Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*.
2. Of course the leaf itself is the result of its own processes of formation and the impingement of various forces to which its own form responds. Leaves are not simply random shapes but those random shapes which, through the eliminations of equally random but less useful shapes provided by natural selection, can provide the tree with maximal life, maximal utilization of competing and potentially scarce resources. As Jakob von Uexküll describes, the leaves of trees are in part the counterpoint of the tree and its various photosynthesizing requirements, but equally the leaf reflects and counterposes the forces of water and of rain, elemental forces which the tree must both withstand and utilize if it is to survive and proliferate:

One of the meaning factors relevant to oak leaves is rain. Upon striking a leaf, falling raindrops follow the physical laws governing the behavior of liquids. In this case, according to Uexküll, the leaf is the "receiver of meaning," which is coupled with the meaning factor "rain" by a "meaning rule." The form of leaves is such that it accommodates the physical laws governing the behavior of liquids. The leaves work together by forming cascades in all directions to distribute rain water on the ground in optimal reach of the roots. . . .

Wherever there is a point, its corresponding counterpart can be found. The physical behavior of raindrops is the counterpoint corresponding to the point of the leaf's form. (Krampen, "No Plant—No Breath," 420)

3. Deleuze and Guattari make territory, and deterritorialization, the conditions for the emergence of art: "The territory is first of all the critical distance between two beings of the same species: Mark your distance. What is mine is first of all my distance: I possess only distances. Don't anybody touch me, I growl if anyone enters my territory." Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 319–20.
4. Some, such as Oliver A. I. Botar, have even suggested that Uexküll's writings have been directly influential on various major artists and architects in the twentieth century, such as the *de Stijl* artist Theo van Doesburg, who in turn quite profoundly influenced Mies van der Rohe and the International style. See Botar, "Notes towards a Study of Jakob von Uexküll's Reception," 596–97.
5. Uexküll, "The New Concept of Umwelt," 118.
6. As Uexküll suggests:

All living things, animal and plants, with few exceptions, appear in pairs; with a male and a female. Sometimes the male and the female organs are in the same individual, as in most plants, sometimes in different individuals, as we have seen them leave the ark of Noah in pairs. We see here the first comprehensive musical laws of Nature (*Weltgesetz*). All living beings have their origin in a duet. The male-female duet is a theme that is interwoven in a thousand variations into the orchestration of the living world. Often the duet is enlarged to a trio, when a third party is needed to bring about the male-female union. We know the role of insects in aiding the pollination of flowers. (*Ibid.*, 118)

7. Karl von Frisch addresses this very issue: "Mutual adaptation between bees and flowers over millions of years has been largely responsible for the present advanced development of the fragrance of flowers and the splendor of their colors. For the greater the flowers' appeal to the senses of smell and vision, the easier it is for the insects to find them, and the better the chance for their pollination and propagation." Frisch, *Animal Architecture*, 66.
8. Uexküll, "An Introduction to Umwelt," 107.
9. Uexküll's commitment to Kantianism is quite well elaborated. This is one of the limits of Uexküll's position—the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, and the conception of space and time as intuitions imposed on the world rather than extracted from it are difficult positions to maintain. But it is also, paradoxically, one of its strengths, at least to the extent that it opens his position up to a perspectivism that could well abandon the concept of the